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THE STATUS OF SOCIALISM IN CONTEMPORARY US POLITICS

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Political Science 491H
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The question of why there has never been a significant socialist movement in the United States has long haunted Marxists. Karl Marx theorized that the most developed capitalist nation would be the first to achieve socialism.¹ The fact that the United States has inverted this expectation challenges the underlying logic of Marxism, prompting numerous academics to explore this question. A review of pertinent literature reveals that socialism's failure in the US is the result of a confluence of causes. Some of these causes are social and others are political factors that are unique to America. An analysis of the history of American socialism indicates that its advancement has also been inhibited by specific actions and tendencies on the part of the American socialist movement. However, there is mounting evidence that socialism is experiencing something of a rebound in America, especially among today's young adults.

Literature Review

Sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset wrote extensively on the idea of "American exceptionalism," especially in relation to the failure of socialism to develop in the US. In his writings, he posits that certain aspects of American society have created a terrain that is uniquely difficult for socialism to thrive in. One of these aspects is the set of common American values originating in its revolutionary founding. Lipset states that American creed can be summarized as antistatism, individualism, populism, and egalitarianism.² Each of these values has inhibited the development of socialism in America in specific ways. Antistatism and individualism both run counter to socialism's emphasis on centralized government authority and collectivism. America's populism and egalitarianism undermine the development of socialism in a much different way. Specifically, Americans believe they already have much of what socialism offers.³ Socialism promises a democratic, classless, anti-elitist society, but most Americans feel that their populism and egalitarianism have already helped create such a society.⁴ Obviously, this

comparison of socialist and American values leaves out differences in property relations.

However, given America's emphasis on individualism, collectivized property does not sound appealing to most Americans. In these ways, America's values have minimalized the appeal of socialism to Americans.

The US's political structure has also provided unique challenges to the development of socialism. Numerous American socialist parties have struggled to overcome the structural barriers to third party success. The first of these roadblocks is America's first-past-the-post, single member district, congressional electoral system that requires parties to win a plurality of the votes in a given constituency to receive any representation.⁵ This system hurts small parties, especially if their support is spread across many constituencies; Voters that may be inclined to support a small party are encouraged to instead vote for a larger party as a vote for a small party will be wasted.⁶ The effect of this system is evident in the electoral experience of the Socialist Party of America. During its peak years, the party won anywhere from three to six percent of the national vote in presidential elections while barely being represented in Congress.⁷ Though socialists can and have won office at local levels, they have struggled greatly at the national level. This factor alone can't explain the electoral woes of American socialism, but it has played a definite role.

Another challenge to socialist parties in the US political structure is the presidential system. America's system for electing its national executive hurts small parties by operating on the same plurality principle as for congressional elections and then aggregating votes through the Electoral College.⁸ The separation of the legislative and executive branches of America's national government prevents minor parties from having any influence on the executive as a

member of a coalition.⁹ This hyper “winner take all” system all but guarantees that minor parties are locked out of the executive branch.

The final aspect of America’s political structure that hurts minor parties like socialist parties is the ideological flexibility of its major parties. The previously noted aspects of America’s political structure encourage the formation of a two party system. These two parties tend to be ideologically diffuse, allowing them to adopt some of the demands of third parties in order to undercut them.¹⁰ This helps keep minor parties from challenging the duopoly of the major parties or even simply enduring.

It is worth noting that all of these aspects of America’s political structure only impinge upon third parties. Given the ideological flexibility of America’s major parties, it is fair to ask why the socialist movement did not attempt to affect change by working within these parties. Historically, this has been due to the dogmatism and sectarianism of the American socialist movement. This subject will be explored in more depth later.

The American socialist movement has also been hurt by the heterogeneity of the American working class. Given that America is an immigrant nation, the nation’s working class is very diverse racially, ethnically, and religiously, compared to other nations.¹¹ This has proven to be a challenge to socialists aiming to appeal to workers along class lines. Political lines were drawn along racial, ethnic, and religious lines, preventing the formation of a cohesive working class party. Furthermore, in the early 20th century, labor organizations like the American Federation of Labor frequently fought to constrict the flow of immigration as a means of protecting native workers.¹²

The issue of America’s heterogeneous working class preventing class solidarity extends beyond labor’s worries about first-generation immigrants to the longstanding subjugation of

African Americans. By relegating African Americans to a permanent underclass, white Americans have come to accept disparities in economic opportunity in regard to other whites so long as they maintain a position above African Americans.¹³ There is substantial evidence to support the idea that the law and the American judiciary have functioned to reinforce racial divisions in the working class throughout the nation's history. For example, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 effectively, "provided that a black person could be seized by any white claiming ownership, brought before a magistrate, and adjudged a slave on the spot with no opportunity to collect evidence or call witnesses."¹⁴ In the 1906 case *Hodges v. United States*, the United States Supreme Court decided that Congress did not have the authority to prohibit racially motivated efforts on the part of white unions to push black workers from their jobs.¹⁵ These represent just two of many legal acts that have infringed upon the rights of African Americans, while promoting the continuation of racial division in America.

A final aspect of American society that has inhibited the development of socialism is the nation's relatively high standard of living and social mobility. From the nation's founding on through the 1800s, America was an underpopulated nation with much room for expansion, resulting in a labor scarcity that drove up worker's wages.¹⁶ Even as immigration reduced this scarcity, industrial development following the Civil War kept wages relatively high in comparison to Europe.¹⁷ America has maintained a fairly high standard of living, preventing the formation of anti-capitalist views among the working class and masking inequalities. Furthermore, the relatively high level of social mobility in America has prevented the formation of class consciousness.¹⁸ In the absence of a rigid class system, socialism's class-based message fell on deaf ears.

Though American society has presented a difficult terrain for socialism, its failure is also due in part to strategic errors driven by American socialism's tendency toward sectarianism and dogmatism. Compared to European socialist parties, America's parties were consistently far more radical and thus prone to division.¹⁹ The exact reasons for this propensity for sectarianism are subject to debate. Some have argued that it is related to the prominence of Protestantism in America, claiming that the sectarian character of American Protestantism carried over into the political domain.²⁰

Though the exact origin of American socialism's dogmatism is in dispute, its effects are evident throughout the history of the movement, especially during the peak of American socialism in the nineteen-teens. The dogmatism of the Socialist Party ostracized organized labor, as the party demanded that unions like the American Federation of Labor (AFL) adopt its ideas, rather than attempting to appeal to labor.²¹ Socialists formed their own labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW was founded in 1905 and was committed to socialism, in a broadly defined sense.²² The IWW generated conflict with the AFL by supporting industrial unionism over craft unionism.²³ Craft unionism, advocated by the AFL, focused on organizing workers by their particular crafts; Industrial unionism sought to organize workers by entire industries, theoretically generating greater class consciousness.²⁴ The IWW was quickly consumed by factionalism over the precise methods the organization should use to pursue socialism.²⁵ Those who supported the pursuit of their goals through the ballot box and those who focused on the economic goals of labor eventually dropped out of the IWW, leaving behind the anarcho-syndicalist faction, dedicated to revolutionary industrial unionism through direct action.²⁶ However, the resolution of the early factional divides of the IWW did not result in a singularly minded organization. The IWW struggled to clearly define its precise goals and

tactics.²⁷ Furthermore, the IWW struggled to balance the short term demands of workers and its long term revolutionary goals. If the organization focused too much on the immediate demands of workers, it could not shape workers into revolutionary radicals; If the IWW focused too much on revolutionary theory, it could not attract and maintain a sizable base of workers.²⁸ The IWW's membership peaked in the nineteen-teens at around 100,000 members.²⁹ However, in the 1920s, the organization declined, due in part to its failure to sink roots in existing trade unions.³⁰ The party's isolation from labor was a crucial mistake, as it effectively cut off the possibility of forming a party to represent the working class.³¹

The socialist movement's dogmatism also led to its disastrous opposition to World War I. The Socialist Party opposed war on principle, believing them to be imperialist conflicts between capitalist interests.³² While European socialist parties abandoned dogma to support the war, the US Socialist Party held strong and paid the price in a massive drop in membership.³³

Furthermore, sectarianism and dogmatism resulted in the Socialist-Communist Split of 1919. While some parts of the Socialist Party advocated for immediate action in response to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and called for following the leadership of Russia, other parts of the party advocated staying the course due to the differences between the conditions in America and Russia.³⁴ Ultimately, the Socialist Party was split and a new Communist Party was formed, resulting in a substantially weakened organization.

The failures of American socialists in the 1930s were due to many of the factors described above. The economic devastation of the Great Depression made the decade a massive opportunity for American anti-capitalists. Polling from that decade indicates a significant leftward shift in public opinion.³⁵ The Socialist Party grew from 15,000 members in 1932 to 25,000 members by 1935.³⁶ The Socialist Party's presidential candidate in 1928, Norman

Thomas, won about 267,000 votes.³⁷ When Thomas ran again in 1932, he received nearly 900,000 votes.³⁸ All of this indicated that American socialists were given a significant opportunity to make their movement larger and more durable.

However, American socialists ultimately failed to capitalize on the chance the Great Depression had given them. One reason for this was the continuation of dogmatism and sectarianism within the Socialist Party. In the early thirties, young recruits to the party formed a militant left wing that adopted revolutionary rhetoric and advocated for cooperation with the Communist Party.³⁹ The Old Guard of the Socialist Party opposed revolutionary rhetoric and, still scarred by the 1919 Socialist-Communist split, refused to cooperate with the Communist Party.⁴⁰ These disagreements proved to be intractable, and the Old Guard withdrew from the Socialist Party in 1936 to form the Social Democratic Federation.⁴¹ In the wake of this split, the Socialist Party's membership declined 40 percent, significantly weakening both the Socialist Party and the broader American socialist movement.⁴²

The larger factor that hurt American socialism in the 30s was President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. The New Deal Era Democratic Party perfectly represents how major American parties can adapt to changes in public opinion, thus hurting third parties. The New Deal was very popular among low-income citizens and trade unionists.⁴³ Roosevelt incorporated populist, anti-business rhetoric into his speeches, expanding his appeal to Americans to left of the Democratic Party.⁴⁴ Roosevelt also offered significant roles in his administration and the Democratic Party to trade unionists and former socialists.⁴⁵ Roosevelt's liberal policies and political maneuvering ate into the socialist movement's base of support.

The Socialist Party struggled to determine how it should respond to and interact with Roosevelt. Socialist Party leaders like Norman Thomas believed that Roosevelt's reforms would

stabilize capitalism in the United States, saving it from a potential collapse.⁴⁶ However, opposing Roosevelt could risk alienating labor, prompting many members of the Socialist Party to oppose running a candidate in 1936.⁴⁷ Despite these concerns, Norman Thomas ran what ended up being a disastrous campaign against Roosevelt. Thomas won just 187,342 votes, the lowest number of votes any Socialist Party presidential candidate had won since 1900.⁴⁸ Socialist Party membership declined from 21,951 in 1934, to 11,711 by mid-1936.⁴⁹ The Socialist Party's influence in labor and overall popularity was significantly damaged by its opposition to Roosevelt.

The hollowing out of the Socialist Party happened below the national level as well. In Michigan, Democratic Governor Frank Murphy supported the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union in 1937 by refusing to call in the National Guard to remove striking workers who were occupying General Motors plants.⁵⁰ When Murphy ran for reelection in 1938, the Socialist Party decided to run a candidate against him.⁵¹ Even though the UAW remained one of the few unions in which the Socialist Party still held some power, the union decided to back Murphy because of his previous support, and many of the remaining socialist UAW members dropped out of the party.⁵² Though the 1930s initially offered a strong opportunity for socialists, dogmatism within the Socialist Party and the inability of the party to overcome the challenge presented by Roosevelt condemned them to even greater obscurity.

Despite the historical struggle of socialism to find success in America, there is evidence that its popularity has been on the rise in recent years. The Occupy Wall Street movement formed in September 2011 in response to lingering economic anxieties from the 2007 financial crisis.⁵³ Though it was not an explicitly socialist movement, Occupy Wall Street had elements of radicalism. The famous slogan of the movement, "We are the 99%," drew attention to concerns

over economic inequality.⁵⁴ The movement expressed disdain for both major parties.⁵⁵ Though it highlighted economic concerns, Occupy Wall Street proposed no specific demands or programs.⁵⁶ This, in combination with the movement's lack of organizational discipline, resulted in Occupy Wall Street disbanding during the winter of 2011 to 2012; Despite tentative plans to resume protests in the spring, the movement never remobilized.⁵⁷ Despite the collapse of the movement, it brought specific concerns and issues to the fore of public consciousness with a radical twist.

The next recent event to suggest a resurgence of socialism was the Democratic Primary bid of Senator Bernie Sanders in 2015 and 2016. Sanders first gained a degree of prominence when he was elected as mayor of Burlington, Vermont, in the 1980s while running as a self-avowed socialist.⁵⁸ Sanders, who is not a formal member of the Democratic Party, campaigned to become the Democratic nominee for President in 2016 while running as a “democratic socialist.”⁵⁹ Despite initial public skepticism about Sanders's prospects, he became the main primary challenger to the eventual Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton.

Something that ought to be addressed when discussing Bernie Sanders is the exact nature of his ideology. As noted, he styles himself as a democratic socialist. When defining democratic socialism, Sanders has frequently compared his ideas to those of Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Norway, as well as progressive Democrats like Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁶⁰ In terms of specific policies, Sanders supports higher taxation, more economic regulation, and more generous social welfare programs.⁶¹ However, some have charged that these real world examples and specific policies do not actually constitute socialism. Academics challenging Sanders's claim of socialism have sometimes labeled him a social democrat, meaning that he supports a mixed economy.⁶² However, past statements by Sanders in favor of the nationalization of major

industries and public ownership of the means of production are more reflective of traditional socialism.⁶³ The contradictions between Sanders's past and present statements do not allow for a clear assessment of his ideology and socialist purity. This is further complicated by his refusal to join the Democratic Party, suggesting he does not view the party as representing his ideology. It is plausible to believe, however, that Sanders still holds typical socialist views while presenting a more moderate image to the public as a pragmatic move.

Though Sanders ultimately lost the 2016 contest for the Democratic nomination, his campaign displayed surprising resiliency. Sanders won a number of state primaries and caucuses during the process. He even scored occasional surprise wins, especially in Michigan where Hillary Clinton had been expected to win by over ten points.⁶⁴ A large amount of Sanders's success was due to the support of young Americans. Polling indicated that a large majority of millennial Democrats supported Bernie Sanders over Clinton.⁶⁵

Following the election of Donald Trump, a new trend emerged that once again suggests the reemergence of socialism in American politics. The Democratic Socialists of America, a socialist organization founded in 1982, suddenly surged in membership.⁶⁶ While the organization had only around 8,000 members in 2015, it rose to around 25,000 in 2017.⁶⁷ Much of this surge came from young people joining the organization. An organizer for the DSA claimed that the average age of the organization's membership dropped from about 64 in 2015, to 30 in 2017.⁶⁸ While Bernie Sanders, who is not a member of the DSA, may have influenced some to join the organization by running as a democratic socialist, the DSA indicates that it experienced its biggest surge immediately following the election of Donald Trump to the presidency.⁶⁹

The DSA's platform calls for an end to traditional capitalism and the formation of a worker-owned economy, suggesting the party is properly socialist.⁷⁰ The organization has put its

greatest focus on the creation of a single payer health care system.⁷¹ Strategically, the party has focused on working within the Democratic Party, but its leadership has expressed interest in running its own candidates at some point.⁷²

Data Analysis

A review of the existing literature suggests that socialism has grown in popularity in the United States in recent years. This apparent trend raises a few questions. In particular, this data analysis aims to answer how popular socialism is in the US and with whom.

Given that these questions pertain to public opinion, they are best answered through an analysis of public opinion polling. This data analysis focuses on public opinion on two subjects. First, public reactions to the term “socialism” are analyzed as a direct measurement of its popularity. Second, public opinion on universal healthcare are analyzed as an indirect measurement.

Universal healthcare was chosen as a polling surrogate for socialism for a few reasons. Finding polling data on the American public’s opinion of socialism proved to be somewhat difficult. Surveys asking about socialism are very limited and are access-restricted, likely due to the recency of the apparent resurgence of interest in socialism in America. As a result of this restriction, this project employs a surrogate polling subject. This issue is further complicated by the nature of socialism’s proposals. Given that socialism describes an entire economic system, it is problematic to describe an individual policy or policy proposal as “socialist,” especially if it were to be implemented in a capitalist economy. This makes the use of a surrogate polling subject in this analysis less than ideal, but the circumstances necessitated this strategy. Given that Bernie Sanders and the DSA have both put a great amount of focus on the subject of healthcare, it was determined that healthcare would be the best available polling surrogate for socialism.

Though it is not a perfect substitute, it at least indicates how receptive groups are to the proposals of contemporary socialists.

The dependent variable for this analysis is the opinions of the respondents. The independent variables are particular demographic groups. The first of these independent variables is the respondent's age. The second independent variable is the respondent's sex. The third independent variable is the respondent's race. The fourth independent variable is the respondent's level of education. The final independent variable is the respondent's level of income.

The hypotheses for this analysis are based on the assumption that those groups more likely to be liberal will also be more likely to have a positive reaction to socialism. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. The younger the respondent, the more likely he/she is to have a positive reaction to both socialism and universal healthcare.
2. Women are more likely to have a positive reaction to socialism and universal healthcare than men.
3. Non-white respondents are more likely to like socialism and universal healthcare than whites.
4. Higher educated respondents are more likely to respond favorably to socialism and universal healthcare.
5. Those with lower amounts of income are more likely to react positively to socialism and universal healthcare.

This data analysis uses two polling datasets obtained from The Pew Research Center. The December 2011 Politics Survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates

International via telephone from December 7 to 11, 2011. The poll has a nationally representative sample of 1,521 adults and has a margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data of +/- 2.9 percent. The January 2017 Political Survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International via telephone from January 4 to 9, 2017. The poll has a nationally representative sample of 1,502 adults and has a margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data of +/- 2.9 percent. The question being analyzed from the December 2011 Politics Survey is question 48a, “Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word – Socialism?”. The question utilized from the January 2017 Political Survey is question 65, “Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?”. This analysis uses the default demographic categories in each dataset for all of the variables except for age. The datasets grouped respondents by individual age in years, so the datasets were recoded to group respondents into the following groups: less than 30 years old, 30-45 years old, 46-64 years old, and 65 years old and up. Chi-squared tests were performed for each category.

Table 1. Responses to “Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word – Socialism?” by Demographic Group

<i>Respondents’ Sex</i>	% Positive	% Negative	% Neither/Neutral	Chi-Square Significance Value
<i>Male</i>	29.3	64.4	2.8	.000
<i>Female</i>	32.8	55.2	3.2	

<i>Respondents’ Age</i>	% Positive	% Negative	%Neither/Neutral	Chi-Square Significance Value
<i><30 yrs.</i>	48.7	43.1	2.5	.000
<i>30-45 yrs.</i>	35.1	56.5	3.3	
<i>46-64 yrs.</i>	25.7	67.0	3.5	
<i>65+ yrs.</i>	13.1	72.1	2.4	

<i>Respondents’ Race/Ethnicity</i>	% Positive	% Negative	% Neither/Neutral	Chi-Square Significance Value
<i>White, Non-Hisp</i>	23.6	67.7	3.0	.000
<i>Black, Non-Hisp</i>	54.6	36.0	2.8	
<i>Hispanic</i>	43.9	49.0	2.0	

Source: Pew Research Center’s December 2011 Politics Survey

Table 1 presents data on responses to the term “socialism” by sex, age, and race. This data conforms to the hypotheses. Women were more likely to have a positive reaction to the term “socialism” than men, though only slightly. The younger the respondent, the more likely they were to express a positive reaction. Also, white, non-Hispanic respondents were the least likely to express a positive reaction, while black, non-Hispanic respondents were the most likely to do so.

Table 2. Responses to “Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word – Socialism?” by Highest Level of Education

<i>Respondent’s Highest Attained Level of Education</i>	% Positive	% Negative	% Neither/Neutral	Chi-Square Significance Value
<i>None, or grade 1-8</i>	34.4	52.2	3.8	.000
<i>High school incomplete (Grades 9-11)</i>	47.2	38.6	1.2	
<i>High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)</i>	31.6	58.9	0.9	
<i>Technical, trade, or vocational school after high school</i>	17.8	67.6	5.5	
<i>Some college, associate degree, no 4-year degree</i>	30.5	62.6	3.1	
<i>College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)</i>	28.2	65.0	3.2	
<i>Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college</i>	26.4	64.6	8.3	

Source: Pew Research Center’s December 2011 Politics Survey

Table 2 lists data on responses to the term “socialism” broken down by the respondent’s highest attained level of education. The data here seems to contradict the initial hypothesis. Respondents with lower levels of education, especially those without any form of higher education like college, were most likely to express positive reactions to socialism.

Table 3. Responses to “Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word – Socialism?” by Total Family Income in 2010

Respondent's Family Income (2010)	% Positive	% Negative	% Neither/Neutral	Chi-Square Significance Value
<\$10K	52.4	37.1	0.8	.000
10 to under \$20K	44.3	43.2	5.0	
20 to under \$30K	34.0	55.0	2.3	
30 to under \$40K	26.0	66.2	0.7	
40 to under \$50K	31.4	64.8	1.8	
50 to under \$75K	24.2	71.9	2.1	
75 to under \$100K	26.2	67.1	4.3	
100 to under \$150K	19.6	71.9	6.1	
\$150K or more	17.0	78.3	4.7	

Source: Pew Research Center's December 2011 Politics Survey

Table 3 contains data on responses to the term socialism broken down by the respondent's total family income before taxes. As predicted by the hypothesis, the lower the respondent's income, the more likely they were to express a positive reaction to the term socialism.

Table 4. Responses to “Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?” by Demographic Group

Respondents' Sex	% Yes	% No	Chi-Square Significance Value
Male	54.6	44.5	.000
Female	66.3	31.3	

Respondents' Age	% Yes	% No	Chi-Square Significance Value
<30 yrs.	71.2	26.9	.000
30-45 yrs.	61.0	37.8	
46-64 yrs.	57.9	40.7	
65+ yrs.	52.5	45.1	

Respondents' Race	% Yes	% No	Chi-Square Significance Value
White, Non-Hisp	49.2	48.7	.000
Black, Non-Hisp	85.1	13.3	
Hispanic	84.2	15.4	

Source: Pew Research Center's January 2017 Political Survey

Note: “Don't Know/Refused” responses are not presented in this table

With the examination of responses to the term “socialism” complete, public opinion on universal healthcare can be analyzed. Table 4 contains data on whether respondent's believed it

is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have healthcare coverage broken down by sex, age, and race. In regards to sex, the results back up the hypothesis as women were more likely to support universal healthcare than men. This also matches the data on reactions to the term “socialism” in terms of women being more in favor than men. In regards to age, a respondent’s youth appears to be a fairly strong predictor of their support for universal healthcare, backing up the hypothesis. Once again, this pattern matches the data on reactions to the term “socialism” when broken down by age. Also, non-white respondents were considerably more likely to support universal healthcare than white respondents, backing up the hypothesis and matching the pattern of reactions to the term “socialism” broken down by race.

Table 5. “Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?” by Respondent’s Highest Attained Level of Education

Respondent’s Level of Education	% Yes	% No	Chi-Square Significance Value
<i>Less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling)</i>	83.2	16.8	.000
<i>High school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with no diploma)</i>	67.7	29.5	
<i>High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate)</i>	60.6	37.2	
<i>Some college, no degree (includes some community college)</i>	52.9	45.9	
<i>Two year associate degree from a college or university</i>	56.6	42.3	
<i>Four year college or university degree/Bachelor’s degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB)</i>	60.8	36.8	
<i>Some postgraduate or professional schooling, no postgraduate degree</i>	50.0	50.0	
<i>Postgraduate or professional degree, including master’s, doctorate, medical or law degree</i>	67.5	32.3	

Source: Pew Research Center’s January 2017 Political Survey

Note: “Don’t Know/Refused” responses are not presented in this table

Table 5 contains data on responses to the question of whether the federal government ought to make sure all Americans have healthcare coverage broken down by the respondent's highest attained level of education. These results are not as clear cut as when broken down by other categories, but it is clear that those with less education, especially those without a high school diploma or GED, were likely to support universal healthcare. However, those with higher educations, especially those with a postgraduate or professional degree, were likely to support universal healthcare as well. The lack of conclusiveness here may be attributable to support for universal healthcare being higher across the board than positive reactions to the term "socialism." However, given that the highest levels of support for universal healthcare were expressed by those with little education, this data does not support the initial hypothesis.

Table 6. Responses to "Do you think it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?" by Respondent's Total Family Income in 2015

Respondent's Family Income (2015)	% Yes	% No	Chi-Square Significance Value
<\$10K	79.1	18.7	.000
10 to under \$20K	74.6	23.1	
20 to under \$30K	67.8	32.0	
30 to under \$40K	67.3	30.7	
40 to under \$50K	71.9	24.3	
50 to under \$75K	40.5	58.5	
75 to under \$100K	50.5	48.7	
100 to under \$150K	53.5	46.3	
\$150K or more	54.2	45.0	

Source: Pew Research Center's January 2017 Political Survey

Note: "Don't Know/Refused" responses are not presented in this table

Table 6 contains data on responses to the question of universal healthcare broken down by the respondent's total family income for 2015. A somewhat clearer pattern is on display here than in Table 5. The data generally suggests that the less the respondent made in 2015, the more likely they were to support universal healthcare. This supports the initial hypothesis and matches the general pattern of reactions to the term "socialism" broken down by income.

This data analysis provides insight into which demographic categories are more likely to support socialism or socialist policies. Women and non-whites appear to be more likely to express positive views of socialism and socialist policy than men and whites respectively. Education level appears to be a somewhat muddled indicator of support for socialism, though the data analyzed here generally suggested that those with less education are more likely to express support. Those who earned less income were more likely to express support for socialism than those who earned more. The demographic factor that appears to stand out the most in predicting support for socialism is age. Young Americans appear far more supportive of socialism and the proposals of contemporary socialists than their elders.

Conclusion

Given that nearly all of the hypotheses were supported by the data, it appears that liberal Americans are more likely to find socialism appealing. As noted in the data analysis, level of education is a somewhat muddled indicator of support for socialism and universal healthcare, but the highest levels of support appeared among those with the least education. This contradicts the initial hypothesis, but the result makes some sense. Americans with lower levels of education are likely to be on the lower end of the income distribution. As the data analysis shows, Americans who make less money are more likely to express favorable views of socialism and support universal healthcare.

The most interesting result of the data analysis is that there appears to have been a serious generational shift on attitudes toward socialism in the United States. This result supports some of the claims presented in the literature review of this paper regarding youth support for Bernie Sanders and the DSA. Obviously, this raises the question of why young people have become more open to socialism in recent years. Part of this can be assigned to the end of the Cold War

and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The young Americans of today have not been raised in a nation fearful of the “Red Menace.” Given this fact, young Americans are less likely to attach a strong negative stigma to socialism than their parents or grandparents.

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union does not fully explain the situation. While it makes sense that the end of the Cold War would lessen the stigma surrounding socialism, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation for young Americans’ strong support for socialist policies like universal healthcare. There is no obvious direct link between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the healthcare policy preferences of Americans, especially given that young Americans express far more support for socialist healthcare policy than socialism itself. This suggests that other factors have caused a genuine shift in the political beliefs and preferences of Americans.

The most likely culprit here is the economic anxiety experienced by young Americans today. Young Americans have witnessed a fair deal of economic unrest in their formative years. The Great Recession of 2007 was one of the worst economic downturns in United States’ history.⁷³ The recession has had lasting effects on the job and financial prospects of American millennials. The income of Americans 25 to 34 years old is 20 percent lower today than what baby boomers earned at the same age.⁷⁴ This age cohort also possesses about half of the net wealth baby boomers possessed by about the same age.⁷⁵ The recession itself and its lingering effects have no doubt generated a great deal of economic anxiety among young Americans, and the recession itself may have triggered questions about the efficacy of capitalism.

Young Americans have also been subject to an ever-growing amount of student debt. College tuition has jumped considerably in recent years. During the past ten years, the average tuition and fees for private four-year schools has risen 54 percent.⁷⁶ The average tuition and fees

at public four-year schools has risen 71 percent over the same time period.⁷⁷ This has resulted in students taking out greater and greater amounts of debt to attend school. The total college-loan balance in the United States has reached \$1.4 trillion, an all-time high.⁷⁸ The average outstanding balance has risen 62 percent over the past 10 years to \$34,144.⁷⁹ This rise in the cost of college, coupled with the lingering economic effects of the recession, has generated even greater economic anxiety among young Americans.

Young Americans face less social mobility than their elders as well. Americans born in the 1940s had about a 90 percent chance of earning more money than their parents at the age of 30.⁸⁰ Americans born in the 1980s, on the other hand, only had about a 50 percent chance of earning more money than their parents at the age of 30.⁸¹ Furthermore, less than 10 percent of Americans living in the lowest quintile of the wealth distribution in America will make it into the top quintile by the end of their lives.⁸² Of those in the middle quintile in America's wealth distribution, only about 20 percent will ever make it into the top quintile.⁸³ This data suggests that class mobility in the United States is shrinking.

Finally, young Americans have grown up in a very economically unequal nation. The amount of wealth inequality in the United States has grown significantly in the past few decades. The median upper-income family in America, meaning the median family earning more than \$127,600 annually, currently holds 75 times the wealth of the median low-income family, meaning the median family earning less than \$42,500 annually.⁸⁴ This multiple was just 28 in 1989.⁸⁵ This shows a significant increase in the level of economic inequality in the United States.

Though all of the above-stated economic trends have no doubt generated some economic angst and hardship for many young Americans, this anxiety alone does not necessarily explain why some are attracted to socialism. Rather, it is the fact that these trends contradict the promises

of Americanism that is driving this shift in opinion. As noted in the literature review, Americans have typically been less receptive to the supposed promises of socialism as they felt America and its ideology helped generate a society that had already fulfilled these promises. Americanism promises democratic society with high social mobility. However, while young Americans have been exposed to this American gospel, many may feel as though these promises have not been fulfilled. The economic hardships and lessened social mobility experienced by young Americans have undermined their faith that America does not possess a rigid class system, or that the country offers equal opportunities for its citizens. The rise of economic inequality has challenged America's supposed anti-elitism. Furthermore, the fact that the Great Recession was due, at least in part, to a lack of sufficient government oversight challenges American anti-statism. The pillars of Americanism have been weakened in the eyes of many young Americans by the economic realities they face. Americanism is struggling to remain a surrogate for socialism, prompting young Americans to turn toward socialism.

The research presented in this paper is not without shortcomings. As noted, this research project's data analysis was constrained somewhat by the availability and accessibility of polling datasets on Americans' views on socialism. Future research may expand upon the analysis done here by looking at a greater number of datasets. In particular, it would be informative to analyze more recent data on how Americans view socialism. The passage of time and the Democratic presidential primary campaign of self-described socialist Bernie Sanders may have impacted public opinion on socialism. Furthermore, the analysis of multiple datasets from different years would help illuminate the exact trend in public opinion on socialism.

Future research may also expand upon the analysis in this paper by looking at polling on a greater variety of subjects, namely topics of concern to socialists. This research could include

public opinion on issues like redistributive tax policies or raising the minimum wage. Public support for labor unions could also be informative. Polling on how concerned Americans feel about economic inequality would also be particularly illuminating. Analyses of public opinion on these subjects would provide a fuller image of the socialism's standing in the United States, as well as how receptive Americans may be to a socialist message.

Continued assessment of the status of socialism in the United States should focus on several areas. First, it will obviously be important to continue to monitor public opinion on socialism. The passage of time may continue to lessen the negative associations many Americans hold regarding socialism. Furthermore, if economic trends do not change to better fulfill the promises of Americanism, more young people may begin to consider socialism as a viable alternative. Also, should socialists achieve a degree of success in being elected to office and passing policies, public opinion could continue to shift.

This last point raises another area of interest. It will be worth watching if and how socialists can overcome the structural barriers they face in elections. As noted in the literature review, socialists will face a number of structural barriers if they attempt to run as independents or third party candidates. Socialists may attempt to integrate into and reshape the Democratic Party, though dogmatism may keep them from attempting such a strategy. Alternatively, the Democratic Party may actively attempt to integrate socialists into the party by coopting socialist proposals like single payer healthcare. This could allow the Democratic Party to place any burgeoning socialist movement into a difficult position, not unlike what Roosevelt accomplished in the 1930s. If for whatever reason socialists don't integrate into the Democratic Party, it will be important to watch how they build and maintain an effective organization, or if they will be doomed to repeat the Socialist-Communist split of 1919 due to dogmatism.

It will be important to watch whether contemporary socialists can form any sort of meaningful relationship with organized labor. The size and nature of organized labor in the United States has changed greatly within the past few decades. The private sector union membership rate has declined from 24.2 percent of workers in 1973, to 6.6 percent in 2014.⁸⁶ Public sector union membership, on the other hand, has held steady at around 35 percent since 1980.⁸⁷ These relatively low rates of union membership suggest that socialists may struggle to find much power through organized labor. However, recent labor activism by public school teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona, suggests that labor retains some power.⁸⁸ Further developments in organized labor and the ability of socialists to make inroads with unions should be watched carefully.

In regards to organized labor, it will also be necessary to watch how the growing racial and ethnic heterogeneity of the United States affects class consciousness. As noted, the heterogeneity of the American working class has historically made it very difficult for socialists to appeal to workers across racial and ethnic boundaries. The millennial generation is particularly racially and ethnically diverse. Only 55.8 percent of millennials are white, and nearly 30 percent are so-called “new minorities,” including “Hispanics, Asians, and those identifying as two or more races.”⁸⁹ It is yet to be seen whether this growing diversity will further inhibit class consciousness, or if coming of age in a diverse environment will allow for the formation of cross-racial and cross-ethnicity labor alliances.

A more concrete and plausible future event to watch will be the Democratic primaries for president in 2020. The posturing of the candidates around socialism or socialist proposals like single payer healthcare could be informative in predicting how the relationship between the Democratic Party and socialists may progress. Furthermore, it is possible that Bernie Sanders

may run once more in this contest. If he should run, it will be informative to watch how well he competes and what influence he can have on the Democratic Party. Should Sanders succeed in winning the Democratic nomination, it would point toward operation within the Democratic Party as a viable means of overcoming the challenges presented by America's electoral system.

¹ Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 16.

² Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (Washington, D.C.: Canadian-American Committee, 1989), 26.

³ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 87.

⁴ Lipset, *Continental Divide*, 26.

⁵ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 44.

⁶ Ibid 45.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid 48.

⁹ Ibid 49.

¹⁰ Ibid 65.

¹¹ Ibid 127.

¹² Ibid 137.

¹³ James Gray Pope, "Why is There No Socialism in the United States? Law and the Racial Divide in the American Working Class, 1676-1964," *Texas Law Review* 94, no. 7 (June 2016): 1555-1590. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 5, 2017), 1559.

¹⁴ Ibid 1565.

¹⁵ Ibid 1589.

¹⁶ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 24.

¹⁷ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 24.

¹⁸ Ibid 26.

¹⁹ Ibid 195.

²⁰ Ibid 34.

²¹ Ibid 173.

²² Milton Cantor, *The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1975* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 35-6.

²³ Ibid 36.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid 37.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid 37-8.

²⁸ Ibid 39.

²⁹ Ibid 50.

³⁰ Ibid 88.

³¹ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 268.

³² Ibid 184.

³³ Ibid 190.

³⁴ Ibid 138-45.

³⁵ Ibid 73.

³⁶ Ibid 72-3.

³⁷ Ibid 73.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid 206.

⁴⁰ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here* 206-7

⁴¹ Ibid 208.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid 209.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid 210-11.

⁴⁸ Ibid 211.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid 215.

⁵¹ Ibid 214.

⁵² Ibid 215.

⁵³ Stephen Eric Bronner, *Moments of Decision: Political History and the Crises of Radicalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 151.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid 152.

⁵⁶ Tom Gallagher, "Feeling the Bern," *New Labor Forum* (Sage Publications Inc.) 25, no. 2 (2016): 18-26. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 6, 2017), 20.

⁵⁷ Bronner, *Moments of Decision*, 152-3.

⁵⁸ John Dillon, "Exactly What Kind of Socialist is Bernie Sanders?" *NPR*, August 27, 2015, Accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/08/27/434872755/exactly-what-kind-of-socialist-is-bernie-sanders>.

⁵⁹ Fred M. Shelley and Ashley H. Mitt. "The Millennial Vote in the 2016 Democratic Primary Elections," *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 273-282. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 6, 2017), 273.

⁶⁰ Clare Foran, "Bernie Sanders Makes His Pitch for Socialism," *The Atlantic*, November 20, 2015, Accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/bernie-sanders-makes-his-pitch-for-socialism/416913/>.

⁶¹ Josh Barro, "Bernie Sanders, Democratic Socialist Capitalist," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2015, Accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/20/upshot/bernie-sanders-democratic-socialist-capitalist.html>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ William J. Conroy, *Bernie Sanders and the Boundaries of Reform: Socialism in Burlington* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), x.

⁶⁴ Shelley and Mitt, "The Millennial Vote," 274.

⁶⁵ Ibid 273.

⁶⁶ Matt Pearce, "Seeing red: Membership triples for the Democratic Socialists of America," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 2017, Accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-democratic-socialists-20170308-story.html>.

⁶⁷ Dave Weigel, "The socialist movement is getting younger thanks to one 75-year-old," *The Washington Post*, August 7, 2017, Accessed February 6, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/the-socialist-movement-is-getting-younger-thanks-to-one-75-year-old/2017/08/06/464f0656-7924-11e7-8839-ec48ec4cae25_story.html?utm_term=.89c5a69058d5.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Justin Mitchell, "Democratic Socialists make headway in U.S. after Trump's win," *Reuters*, February 21, 2017, Accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-politics-demsocialists/democratic-socialists-make-headway-in-u-s-after-trumps-win-idUSKBN16014M>.

⁷⁰ Weigel, "The socialist movement is getting younger."

⁷¹ Gregory Krieg, "Democratic Socialists are taking themselves seriously. Should Democrats?" *CNN*, August 8, 2017, Accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/08/politics/democratic-socialists-of-america-convention-2017/index.html>.

⁷² Mitchell, "Democratic Socialists make headway."

⁷³ Gail MarksJarvis, “Thanks to recession, millennials trail their boomer parents financially,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 2017, Accessed April 16, 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-millennials-money-0212-biz-20170210-story.html>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jessica Dickler, “College applicants are stressed over paying the tab,” *CNBC*, March 27, 2018, Accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/27/college-applicants-are-stressed-over-paying-the-tab.html>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Heather Long, “U.S. Inequality keeps getting worse,” *CNN*, December 22, 2016, Accessed April 16, 2018, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/12/22/news/economy/us-inequality-worse/index.html>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ana Swanson, “Striking new research on inequality: ‘Whatever you thought, it’s worse,’” *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2016, Accessed April 16, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/10/06/striking-new-research-on-inequality-whatever-you-thought-its-worse/?utm_term=.7c283e4d9431.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Lydia DePillis, “America’s wealth gap is bigger than ever,” *CNN Money*, last modified November 3, 2017, Accessed April 16, 2018, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/11/03/news/economy/wealth-gap-america/index.html>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “The Shrinking American Labor Union,” *The New York Times*, last modified February 7, 2015, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/business/the-shrinking-american-labor-union.html>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Matt Pearce, “Around the U.S., protesting teachers see some gains in conservative states,” *The Los Angeles Times*, last modified April 15, 2018, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-teachers-strikes-20180416-story.html>.

⁸⁹ William H. Frey, “Diversity defines the millennial generation,” *The Brookings Institution*, last modified June 28, 2016, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2016/06/28/diversity-defines-the-millennial-generation/>.

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